



Small business vision becomes reality for a Beaufort cabinet designer

Visit Distinctive Designs Cabinetry in Beaufort's historic downtown district and you might find it closed... for business, that is. Owner Pat Betz might be meeting with a client – perhaps an architect or a couple planning to restore and remodel their historic home – or going “out in the field” to take measurements for one of her cabinet designs. Or she could be working with her accountant or planning and sketching her latest custom cabinet. As the sole employee at her flourishing small business, she “wears many different hats.” And it is with the freedom of sole and self-employment that Pat Betz has been able to take charge of her destiny and her business and make Distinctive Designs in Cabinetry a success.

Pat, who has been in kitchen and bath design for more than 20 years with various “mom and pop” organizations, presented a plan to her former employers to improve their business. Already a large and well-established cabinet company, they showed little interest. But Ms. Betz says, “I was so sold on this idea that I had to figure out how to do it. And that's how it (Distinctive Designs in Cabinetry) happened.”

In 1999, she met with Martin Goodman of the Beaufort Small Business Development Center to begin the process of developing her idea into an actual business.

“I came up with this vision and, with SBDC's help, was able to make it into a business,” Pat says.

Because she had already acquired a reputation as *the* kitchen and bath cabinetry designer in Beaufort, Pat could begin her business with an extensive client referral base throughout the community and surrounding region. The SBDC helped her to manage the paperwork to secure funding for her new business, and she received a Small Business Administration loan for \$60,000 through the Lowcountry National Bank. With the SBA-guaranteed financing, Pat opened Distinctive Designs in Cabinetry in October 2001.

Nearly all of Pat's jobs are based on referrals. A typical job begins with an appointment. The appointment system “flows amazingly well,” she says.

Pat meets with the client and explains the full process. The client, whether a builder or a homeowner or an interior designer, discusses what is wanted. Pat and the client start with the concept, which usually includes both remodeling of the existing room – often a kitchen – and new construction.

“We take the conceptual dream and tweak it a bit,” she says.

After creating a blueprint for the client, Pat utilizes software that gives the blueprint three dimensions, allowing the client a glimpse of the completed project. With the design approved, she sends the plan to one of several out-of-state custom manufacturers, where the design comes to life. A subcontractor for Distinctive Designs in Cabinetry then installs the finished product.

“We take it from conception to completion,” Pat says.

Owning a business is a “new world” after having worked under employers’ direction for 18 years, according to Pat. Of course, it provides “a lot more variety” with the every day challenges – and rewards – of ownership. Pat enjoys the independence and the ability “to implement things that would be good concepts.”

Distinctive Designs in Cabinetry

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